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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 HO CHI MINH CITY 001350

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [PREF](#) [VM](#)  
SUBJECT: SOUTHERN DISSIDENT WATCH POST-APEC

REF: A. HCMC 1270; B) HCMC 1090 AND PREVIOUS; C) HANOI  
[¶B.](#) 2816  
[¶C.](#) HCMC 999 AND PREVIOUS; E) HCMC 630; F) HCMC 994  
[¶D.](#) AND PREVIOUS

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Classified By: Consul General Seth Winnick for reasons 1.5  
b/d.

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary and Comment: In the run up to APEC and in response to the stepped up activities of various dissident groups, the GVN intensified its suppression of pro-democracy activists. As reported Ref C, example phone and Internet access to dissidents was cut and many faced constant police harassment.

[¶2.](#) (C) Post-APEC, the GVN appears to be taking a two-pronged approach to the dissident question. Internationally recognized dissidents and intellectuals based in southern and central Vietnam report that the level of surveillance and harassment has returned to "routine" levels since the conclusion of APEC. However, GVN authorities continue to detain at least 13 and possibly as many as 17 activists who were apparently involved in attempting to organize and mobilize farmers, workers and students. For example, three members of a newly founded independent workers and farmers association reportedly were detained in early November. In another case, HCMC police involuntarily committed a land-rights activist, Bui Kim Thanh, to the criminal ward of the national mental hospital in Dong Nai Province. Thanh was a principal mover in the peasants' land rights movement centered in HCMC and the Mekong Delta (Ref A).

[¶3.](#) (C) Over the next few weeks, HCMC will begin to raise the profile of our contacts with dissidents and the families of those in detention. In particular, we will focus on the case of Bui Kim Thanh and urge her release from involuntary confinement in a mental institution. A summary of the status of dissident groups follows. End Summary and Comment.

Do Nam Hai and the 8406 Bloc

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[¶4.](#) (C) Co-founder of the 8406 Bloc Do Nam Hai told us that police substantially intensified pressure on him two weeks before the APEC Leaders' Summit. He was summoned for police questioning virtually every day during the week of

APEC. He also was prevented from meeting other dissidents. On November 29 he was picked up by police while on his way to a press conference with foreign reporters and other HCMC democracy activists. On November 28, Hai told us that police surveillance had eased and he was no longer summoned for police questioning.

15. (C) Four members of the 8406 Bloc remain under detention. Truong Quoc Huy, who first surfaced as an Internet dissident in the PalTalk case in 2005, was arrested in August. Huy was detained after "covering" land protests in HCMC for the 8406 Bloc and posting reports of the protests on the Internet. Huy's mother and brother Truong Quoc Tuan (also an 8406 Bloc member) have not been able to visit Huy. They report that police also have pressured their employer to end their contract. Three members of the Bach Dan Giang group -- a little-known 8406 affiliate planning to organize student-led protests during APEC -- have been under arrest since September. The wife of Nguyen Ngoc Quang told us that he has been formally charged with "propagandizing against the government." Family members of Vu Hoang Hai and Pham Ba Hai also report the individuals' continuing detention. Additionally, another associate of Huy's, Nguyen Thu tram, remains in hiding. According to Do Nam Hai, she fears arrest for her role in covering land protests in HCMC.

16. (C) 8406 Bloc member Nguyen Chinh Ket also told us that he had been summoned for regular interrogation sessions with police in the three weeks prior to, and during, APEC. On November 15 police searched his house and confiscated two computers, one of which belonged to his daughter, a graphics design student. Pro-democracy materials were found on both machines, leading the police to summon his daughter for questioning as well. Although police harassment has ebbed, Ket complained that the authorities were preventing him from pursuing his travel plans to the United States where he is to receive an award from Vietnam Human Rights network based in California. He told us that, on November 28, police prevented him from entering HCMC's Citibank offices to pay the mandatory visa application fee.

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Police intercepted him at the entrance to the building and told him that he was a security threat and could not enter. On November 29, Ket's daughter was able to enter the building and pay the visa fee on his behalf. Ket will attempt to visit the Consulate for his visa interview on December 4.

7.(C) Cong Thanh Do, the American citizen member of the People's Democratic Party of Vietnam (PDP-VN), reports to us that six other members of the group remain in police custody. (Per Ref B, the six were arrested along with American Citizen Cong Thanh Do in August for their efforts to disseminate anti-Communist Party writings in HCMC and the Mekong Delta.) We have only been able to learn the names of three of the PDP-VN arrestees: Le Nguyen Sang, Le Trung Hieu and Huynh Nguyen Dao. We have been able to contact family members of Sang and Dao, who confirm their arrest and possible sentencing for "violating information technology regulations" and "storing anti-government materials."

18. (C) Dr. Que reported on November 27 that the checkpoints and heavy police surveillance placed around his home pre-APEC have been removed. His landline and cell phones remain blocked, but he still has Internet access. The cell phone of Que's wife also is operating normally. Before and during APEC, Que reported that police had blocked a number of dissidents, including Do Nam Hai, from visiting him. Que confirmed that he reversed his previous decision and has joined formally the "Alliance for Democracy," a pro-democracy umbrella organization created by Do Nam Hai and Hue-based activist Father Nguyen Van Ly. (Note: Que's

profile was raised higher on the eve of the APEC Leaders' Summit because of his op-ed piece on democracy in Vietnam in the Asian Wall Street Journal. End Note.)

The UBCV

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¶9. (C) Thich Vien Dinh, a leading monk in the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), told us that police intensified its oversight of key UBCV pagodas in HCMC in the weeks leading up to APEC. On November 19 he was summoned by police who ordered him not to meet any foreigners until after November 21. Police also ordered him to expel from his pagoda two visiting UBCV monks from the Mekong Delta - Thich Thien Minh and Thich Chon Tam. The two monks had sought shelter in HCMC following police pressure on them and their families in the run up to APEC. Thich Vien Dinh told us that he was ignoring the expulsion order and on November 28, he reported that police pressure had returned to "normal." Thich Vien Dinh added that, on November 11, he escorted UBCV Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang back to his pagoda in Binh Dinh province. The Patriarch had requested to return to Central Vietnam not until early 2007, when his next medical check in HCMC is due.

Tran Khue and Bui Kim Thanh

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¶10. (C) Deputy General Secretary of the Democratic Party of Vietnam Tran Khue appears to be the only major HCMC-based dissident to report continuing high levels of surveillance and harassment after APEC. Khue told us that police continue to main new checkpoints to deter visitors - especially land rights activists and petitioners. He added that, on November 17, he was "invited" to meet with police to discuss the case of land rights activist Bui Kim Thanh, but he refused to attend.

¶11. (C) Khue told us that Thanh remains involuntarily committed to the criminal ward of the national mental institution in Dong Nai province. Some colleagues in the land dispute movement have been able to visit her on occasion. They reported that Thanh said that authorities offered her early release on the condition that she would commit not to involve herself any longer with the land rights movement or the Democratic Party of Vietnam. Thanh reportedly refused.

The Hoa Hao

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¶12. (C) A contact in the Hoa Hao community in the Mekong Delta province of An Giang told us that he and another 40 followers from provinces in the Mekong Delta planned a demonstration in front of the HCMC zoo on November 19, the

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day that the President arrived in HCMC. Police prevented the effort. Our contact said that, on November 18, when he and other demonstrators were to leave for HCMC, police surrounded their houses. HCMC police also rounded up others who had arrived in HCMC earlier. These individuals were released after the President departed Vietnam.

¶13. (C) Separately, Hoa Hao contacts told us that on November 21, police in the Mekong Delta province of Vinh Long arrested Nguyen Van Thi, a member of the Hoa Hao group affiliated with radical activist Le Quang Liem. On November 4, Vinh Long police also arrested Le Van Soc, another leader of the Liem faction in the province. A member of the 8406 bloc, Soc reportedly was wanted by police for his involvement in an earlier hunger-strike protest in May (Ref E). He reportedly was planning a similar protest in the run-up to the APEC Summit. Two other Hoa Hao followers affiliated with Liem were detained in October: Nguyen Van Tho and his wife Duong Thi Tron.

Tho is Liem's "chief representative" in Dong Thap Province. The couple was the chief organizers and hosts of the May hunger strike. Tron and Liem's adopted daughter Nguyen Thi Thanh (who was arrested in February 2006) were accused by police of homicide for instigating and assisting in the immolation and death of a Hoa Hao elder - Nguyen Thi Thu - in March 2001. Liem himself is being investigated by police for his alleged leading role in the immolation.

Fathers Ly and Loi  
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¶14. (C) Post is in regular email and cell phone contact with dissident leader Father Nguyen Van Ly. Father Ly, co-founder of the 8406 bloc and of the "Alliance for Democracy," reported that he and other Hue-based dissidents did not face any additional pressure before or during APEC.

Ha Si Phu  
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¶15. (C) Dalat-based dissident writer Ha Si Phu told us that police intensified surveillance of his house three weeks ago, before and during APEC. For the first time in two years, police established a round-the-clock checkpoint directly in front of his house to prevent access. The police presence ended after APEC.

The Independent Trade Union  
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¶16. (C) On October 20, Hanoi-based dissident Nguyen Khac Toan and two young HCMC-based individuals, Le Tri Tue and Tran Thien An, announced on the Internet the creation of the "Independent Trade Union of Vietnam." Tue is a private businessman and An is a graduate student at the HCMC Law School. Tue told us that he was summoned for repeated working sessions with police from November 14 to 20. He was questioned about his membership in the 8406 bloc and his involvement in the trade union. (Earlier in the year, Tue was involved in photographing land rights protestors in HCMC and disseminating pictures on the Internet.) An told us by phone that police have "been asking around" about him, but have not yet approached him directly. As of November 30, both Tue and An have not been detained by police.

United Workers - Farmers Organization  
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¶17. (C) In an Internet declaration October 30, Nguyen Tan Hoanh, Nguyen Thi Le Hong, Hoang Huy Chuog and Nguyen Thi Tuyet announced the creation of the "United Workers-Farmers Organization (UFWO)." The organization's "charter" denounces the Communist Party for human rights violations, calls for the formation of independent labor unions and protests the lack of land and property rights in Vietnam. Of the four founders, only Nguyen Tan Hoanh is known to us or to others in the dissident community. Hoanh reportedly participated in wildcat labor strikes in the HCMC area in early 2006. According to Internet reports on a dissident web site, three of the four members of the group reportedly were arrested within two weeks of the formation of the group. Family members of Doan Huy Chuong confirmed to us that he had been detained along with his father, Doan Van Dien, on November 24 in Dong Nai province for their participation in the UWFO. Chuong's brother was also taken in but later released. Chuong's family told us he and his father are being kept in a prison in Dong Nai province.

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Nguyen Tan Hoanh was reportedly detained in Dong Nai province and Nguyen Thi Le Hong detained in HCMC on November 15. In an e-mail to us, the PDP-VN Cong Thanh Do reported that another three members of the UWFO, Le Ba WINNICK